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FOREST, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE DEPARTMENT

NOTIFICATION

The 9th February 2024

No. 2488—FE-ENV1-ENV-0011/2023-FE & CC.—The divine “Gupteswar Forest” situated in the southernmost region of Odisha and a part of Eastern Ghats, is a great assemblage of significant species of flora and fauna. This sacred place always drags the attention of naturalists, environmentalists, researchers, and tourists for its rich biodiversity and the gigantic Shiva Linga which has rich mythological significance and mesmerizing beauty of the surrounding domain. The 350 hectares of demarcated area that intersects Gupteswar PRF and Dondrakhol RF comprises at least 608 faunal species and 615 floral species. Faunal richness includes 28 species of mammals, 188 species of birds, 18 species of amphibia, 48 species of reptiles, 45 species of Pisces, 141 species of butterflies, 43 species of moths, 41 species of odonates, 30 species of spiders, six species of scorpion and 20 species of lower invertebrates. Out of the total fauna recorded in this area, 15 species have been categorized as “Threatened” under the IUCN red list. Significant fauna includes mugger crocodile (*Cracodylus palustris*), Kanger Valley Rock gecko (*Hemidactylus Kangerensis*), Sacred Grove Bush Frog (*Raorchestes sanctisylvaticus*), rare butterfly species “Marbled Map”, Eastern Ghat endemic gecko (*Hemidactylus sushildattai*), avifauna like Black Baza, Jerdon’s Baza, Malabar Trogon, Common Hill Myna, Whitebellied Woodpecker, and Banded Bay Cuckoo, etc. The mysterious limestone caves of Gupteswar are adorned with eight species of bats out of sixteen reported in southern Odisha. Among them, two species *Hipposideros galeritus* and *Rhinolophus rouxii* are under the Near Threatened category of IUCN.

Gupteswar is also bestowed with subterrain vegetation with a rich diversity of threatened and medicinal plants which include 182 species of tree, 76 species of shrubs, 177 species of herbs, 69 species of climbers, and 14 species of orchids. Other than that, 17 species of ferns, 20 species of bryophytes, 15 species of lichens, 44 species of macrofungi, and one species of gymnosperm have also been documented in this area. The forest harbors many Rare, Endemic, and Threatened (RET) plants like *Oroxylum indicum*, *Tritaxis glabella*, *Rauvolfia serpentina*, *Gardenia gummifera*, and *Crateva magna*. Gupteswar is also a haven of rich genetic diversity of tropical roots and tuber plants such as Yams (*Dioscorea alata*, *D. bulbifera*, *D. hamiltoni*), wild ginger (*Zingiber chrysanthum*), Wild turmeric (*Curcuma neilgherrensis*, *C. aromatic*) and has a

rich source of non-timber forest products like Jhuna, Lakha, and leaves of Shorea robusta, Diospyros melanoxylon which gives source of income to the local people. One micro-fungal species isolated from the common fern Azoila sp, was found to have profound amylolytic activity. Brief information on the Biodiversity of Gupteswar forest is given in Annexure I.

The people living in and around the Gupteswar Forest have rich traditional and cultural beliefs mostly linked to the forest. They are ethically and socio-economically attached to the biodiversity of the forest and use various bioresources for their livelihood. Hence, the local people have consistently looked for the protection and conservation of the biodiversity of this Forest from various anthropogenic and climatic pressures.

Whereas, it is provided under Section 37 of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 that the State Government may in consultation with the local bodies, notify in the Official Gazette, areas of biodiversity importance as Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS) under this Act.

Whereas, the Rule 20 (2) of the Odisha Biological Diversity Rules, 2012 mandates the State Biodiversity Board to frame guidelines on the selection, management and other aspects of Biodiversity Heritage Sites. In pursuance of these provisions the Odisha Biodiversity Board has notified the guidelines vide Extraordinary Gazette of Odisha No. 2117 dated the 6th December 2017. As per the guidelines well defined areas that are “Unique, ecologically fragile ecosystems terrestrial, coastal and inland waters and marine having rich biodiversity comprising of anyone or more of the following components: richness of wild as well as domesticated species or intra-specific categories, high endemism, presence of rare and threatened species, keystone species, species of evolutionary significance, wild ancestors of domestic / cultivated species or their varieties, past pre-eminence of biological components represented by fossil beds and having significant cultural, ethical or aesthetic values and are important for the maintenance of cultural diversity, with or without a long history of human association with them” can be declared as Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS) in the State.

Whereas, proposals from Biodiversity Management Committee of Gupteswar Gram Panchayat (Haladikund), Divisional Forest Officer, Jeypore Forest Division, Koraput and MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, Jeypore, Koraput have been received for declaring “Gupteswar Forest” (Adjacent forest to Gupteswar Shiva temple and which is part of Gupteswar PRF and Dhondrakhola RF) as Biodiversity Heritage Site in prescribed *pro forma* of BHS guidelines issued by Government of Odisha. The proposal submitted by the BMC of Gupteswar (Haladikund) has been approved in Gram Sabha held on the 30th May 2023 for declaring “Gupteswar Forest” (Adjacent forest to Gupteswar Shiva temple and which is part of Gupteswar PRF and Dhondrakhola RF) as BHS.

Whereas, following the guidelines of BHS, Odisha Biodiversity Board has published the preliminary information on “Gupteswar Forest” as the proposed BHS in local newspapers ‘The Prameya’, ‘Dharitri’, ‘Amruta Media’ (published on the 3rd August 2023) and English Newspaper “The Times of India”, also in local electronic media like Nandighosh TV, Jeypore Media and other News Social Media Platforms.

Whereas, the Odisha Biodiversity Board has processed the same as per above guidelines and recommended the proposal for declaring “Gupteswar Forest” as the Biodiversity Heritage Site. Now, therefore. the Government of Odisha have been pleased to declare an area of 350 ha. of “Gupteswar Forest” (adjacent forest to Gupteswar Shiva temple and which is part of Gupteswar PRF and Dhondrakhol RF) of Koraput district under Jeypore Forest Division as the ‘Biodiversity Heritage Site of Odisha (as per the Map and Boundary description in Annexure-II, Annexure- III, and Annexure-IV), as per Section 37 of the Biological Diversity Act 2002 and Rule 20(2) of Odisha Biodiversity Rules, 2012 and as per the criteria of the Guidelines issued by the Government vide Extraordinary *Gazette of Odisha* No. 2117 dated the 6th December 2017.

By order of the Governor

SATYABRATA SAHU

Additional Chief Secretary to Government